

## Budgets on My Mind: Changing Budget Allocations to Meet Teaching and Research Needs: University of Washington Case Study

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# Budgets on My Mind: Changing Budget Allocations to Meet Teaching and Research Needs: University of Washington Case Study

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## Abstract

In fall 2017, the University of Washington (UW) Libraries began a multiyear process to examine and update the resources budget structure and allocation model. The budget structure and allocation model at UW Libraries remained fundamentally the same for over 20 years. In that time there has been a shift toward more interdisciplinary research as well as significant changes in scholarly publishing and the acquisition environment for academic libraries. Recognizing that our budget structure and allocation model are no longer aligned with the changes in our environment, UW initiated a process with the goal of developing a model that is better designed to serve students and researchers and allow the libraries to respond nimbly to the challenges and opportunities in the publishing and acquisition environment.

This paper will describe our budget review process as a case study, which is intended to be a multiyear phased approach. In the first year, we implemented an environmental scan and survey of library budget structure and allocation practices. We will present a summary of findings from this survey, discuss some conclusions that inform our budget review process, as well as describe trends in academic library budget practices. The UW case study offers insight into one library's approach to the difficult and sometimes contentious process of making changes to the resources budget structure and allocation model. We hope that we can provide practical ideas that could be implemented at other institutions.

## Introduction and UW Context

The University of Washington Libraries is one library serving three campuses and ranked in the top 10 of U.S. public research universities according to the Association of Research Libraries (ARL). We serve nearly 50,000 full-time students, over 12,000 graduate students, and grant PhDs in 116 fields. The libraries' collections expenditures average about \$16M, and we operate 16 physical library locations with 350 employees.<sup>1</sup>

The budget structure and allocation model at UW Libraries remained fundamentally unchanged for over 20 years. Recognizing that the budget model no longer aligned with the changes in our environment, we initiated a process with the goal of developing a model better designed to serve students and researchers, and allow us to respond nimbly to challenges and opportunities. To start the process, an Environmental Scan Task Group was convened. They were charged with "establish[ing] baseline data" and "providing examples of budget allocation models and processes that will create more sustainable strategies for collection development."

When the task group conducted their literature review, they collectively read 46 articles. By doing so, they learned about the 2013 Charleston Conference presentation "Creating a New Collections Allocation Model for These Changing Times: Challenges, Opportunities, and Data" by Gregory A. Crawford and Lisa German.<sup>2</sup> Their proceedings included a copy of a survey that was adapted and administered with the ALA ALCTS Chief Collection Development Officers (CCDO) at Large Research Libraries in January 2018. CCDO Libraries were invited to participate for the month of January from the 4th through the 26th. The response rate was 24 libraries, about 51% of the CCDO group.

The final survey was comprised of 20 questions, mostly multiple choice, checkboxes, and short answer. Questions were divided into three sections: (1) institutional demographics; (2) current collections budget allocation practices; and (3) context and motivations for making or considering changes to budget allocations. The full survey is available in Appendix A: A Survey of Collections Budget Allocation Practices. We applied for exempt determination by UW Human Subjects IRB (Institutional Review Board) Review and

received approval to proceed with administering the survey. E-mail invitations were distributed via various lists, such as ARL-AULs, ALA Scholarly Communications and Collection Development Lists, and a few consortia. The survey was opened prior to ALA Annual and remained open until the end of July 2018.

### Summary Trend Analysis from Survey Data

Survey responses are based on 91 responses. Nearly all (89 or 98%) of survey participants were from academic libraries, with only two public library participants. More than a third (33 or 36%) have full-time enrollment of less than 10k students. A vast majority (83 or 91%) grant bachelor degrees, while (8 or 9%)

do not (public libraries and community colleges). Two-thirds or nearly 70% offer doctoral degrees and one-third offer less than 24 PhDs. Further institutional demographics from respondents are provided in Table 1 and Table 2.

About half (54% or 50 out of 91) of respondents are currently using historical allocation patterns. More than a third (30 out of 91) allocate budgets based on individual subject funds. Almost 70% (63 out of 91) allocate serials off the top—25% (23 out of 91) as part of a single comprehensive serials line and 44% (40 out of 91) in separate lines according to serial type, for example, continuations, databases, e-journals, and so on (see Table 3).

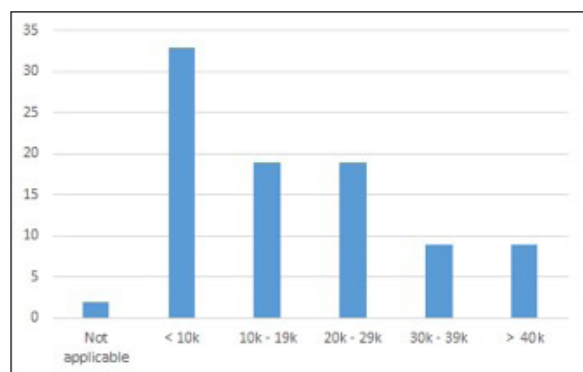


Table 1. What is your total student FTE?

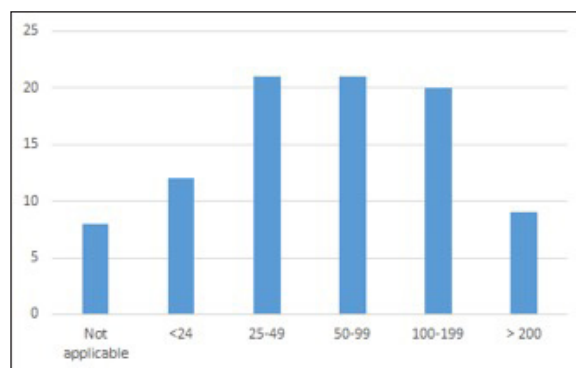


Table 2. Number of bachelor's degree fields.

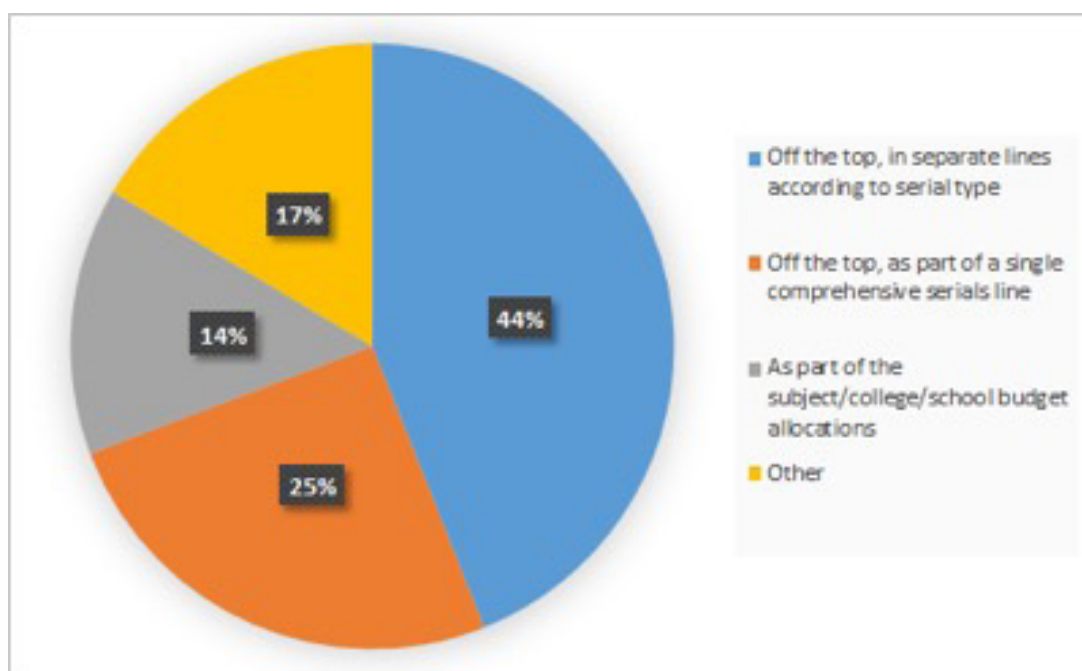
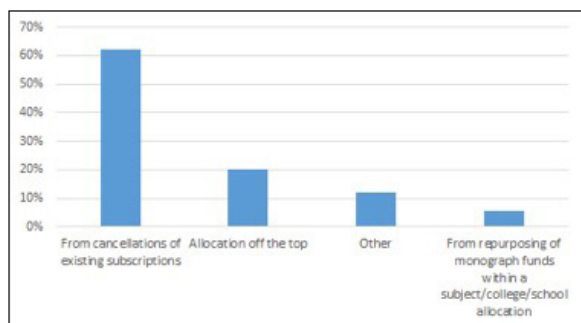


Table 3. How do you allocate funds for serials/continuing resources?



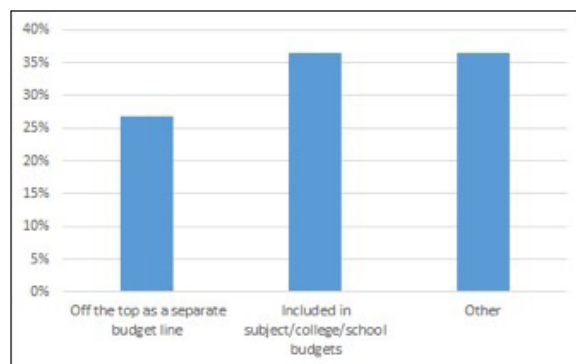
**Table 4. How do you create funds for new serials?**

When asked, “How do you create funds for new serials?” a majority (77 or 62%) said “From cancellations of existing subscriptions.” Additional responses are provided in Table 4.

Respondents were asked, “How do you allocate funds for new/emerging needs (e.g., new programs, data, streaming media, etc.)?” While nearly a third (25 or 27%) indicated “Off the top as a separate budget line,” more said that funds are Included in subject/college/school budgets or “other”; see Table 5 for more details. When asked to specify other ways of allocating for new/emerging needs, responses varied. A few examples include:

- *With great difficulty; something always suffers; occasionally we ask for special 1x funds to try something.*
- *Ideally included in subject/college/school budgets—not always.*
- *Contingency/funds held back for this purpose.*
- *Variety of methods. Refocus monograph funds. Obtain department funds from outside the libraries’ budget. Modify journal packages.*

In terms of context and motivations for changes, nearly two-thirds (52 or 57%) participate in new program planning and similarly 53 or 58% utilize some type of cost sharing with another department or library on campus, in a system. However, it’s clear that budget allocations are on everyone’s minds since 66% of total participants made changes to allocations *in the last 5 years* and about half (52%) are making changes *now or in near future*. When respondents were asked about motivations for changes, Table 6 shows the following trends:

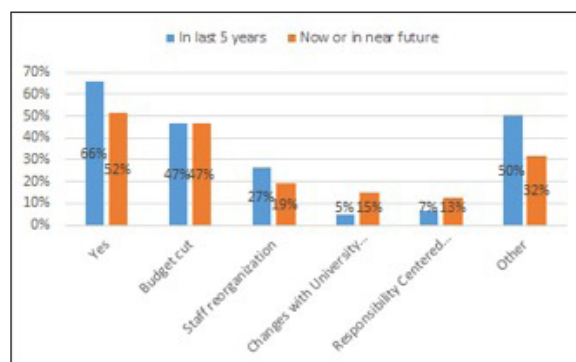


**Table 5. How do you allocate funds for new/emerging needs?**

- Budget cuts have been and continue to be primary motivation.
- Staff reorganization is still a strong motivator but is declining.
- Versus changes with Changes with University Administration and Responsibility Centered Management Implementation (e.g., individual academic units have control of revenue and expenditures, including support for library) has been growing.

However, there are clearly “other” motivations in the past five years and the present. In the last five years, examples include:

- *Campus changed budgetary model so the library aligned internal budget to mirror campus budgetary process.*
- *Changes in the liaison model and wanting to be able to track spending at a more granular level.*
- *Publisher movement to single invoices covering all journals.*



**Table 6. Changes to allocations?**

- *We want to increase our understanding of our expenditures, our consortial commitments, value return, shift to user-responsive purchasing, simplifying fiscal accounting, clarifying spending categories to strengthen support for minimum serials inflation on an ongoing basis.*

Now or in the near future, some respondents said:

- *Moving away from upfront subject fund allocation to more agile/less prescriptive model.*
- *We're getting in our own way with all these little subject funds.*
- *Enhancing user experience (using funds for user initiated purchasing), increasing efficiency, clarifying our understanding of and narratives around how we are leveraging our materials budget.*
- *Integrating OA investments with more traditional acquisitions.*

## Compare/Contrast with UW

Comparing the University of Washington Libraries to our findings from the survey, we see that we are very similar to our peers in many respects.

For the most recent fiscal years, the UW Libraries allocated approximately 80% of the materials budget to serials and ongoing costs. This is consistent with the survey findings that over 60% of libraries responding reported allocating between 70% and 90% of their materials budget to serials and ongoing costs; see Figure 1 for more details.

Additionally, the UW Libraries currently allocates to over 70 subject funds. Until this year that included allocations to separate fund lines for monograph/one-time purchases and serials. As part of the budget review process described earlier, we collapsed many of the individual subject-level serial fund lines into larger serial fund lines for discipline groups for the Sciences, Social Sciences, Arts and Humanities, and Business.

This is also consistent with our survey findings as indicated in Figure 2, where 33% of responding libraries said they allocate to individual subject funds, and another 30% indicated they use some mixture of allocation models.

Lastly, it is clear we are not alone in reexamining our budget allocation practices and strategies. As mentioned earlier, more than half of the respondents answered "yes" to the questions, "Have you made any changes to the way you allocate your collections

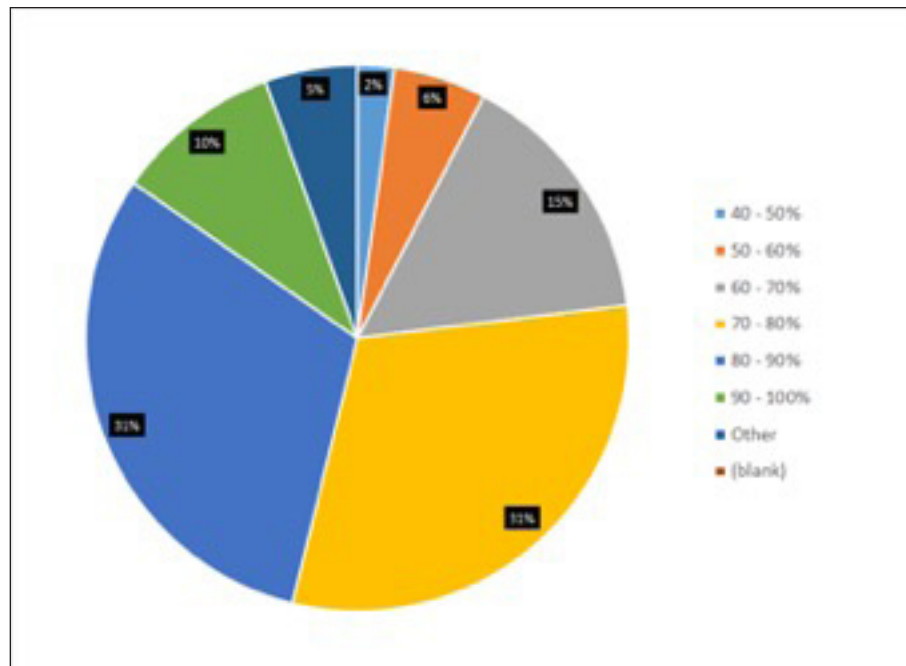
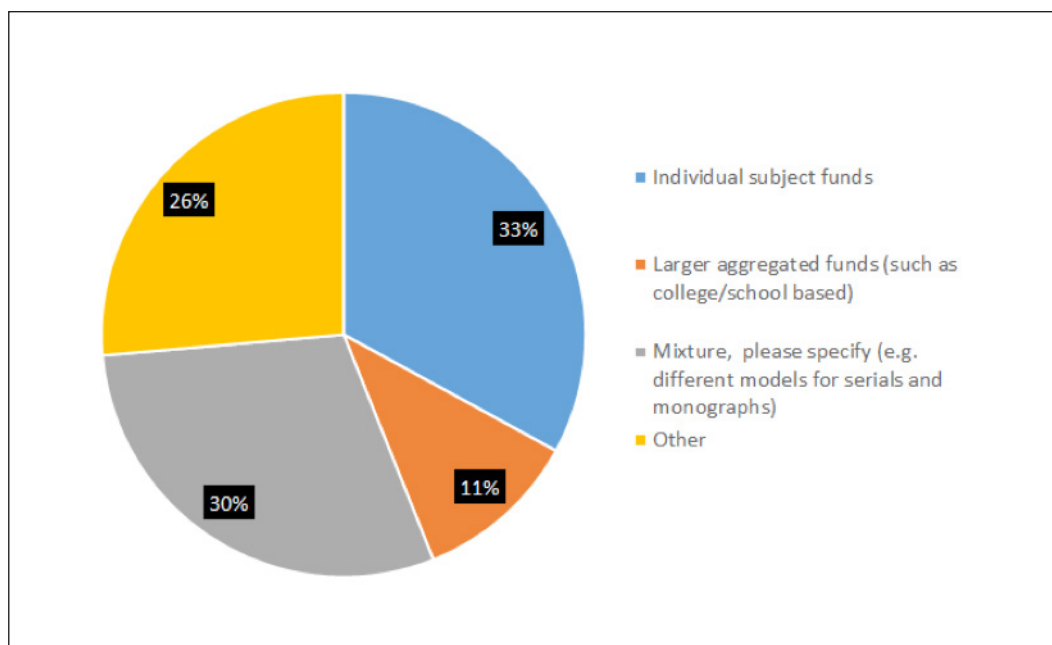


Figure 1. What percent of your library materials budget is typically allocated to serials/ongoing costs?



**Figure 2. What is the level of granularity or specificity of your budget?**

budget in the last 5 years?” or, “Are you considering any significant changes now or in the near future to the way you allocate your collections budget?”

## Conclusion and Next Steps

While we did find many similarities among respondents in the survey, there were also many differences and many libraries looking for a new and better way to manage their budget to best serve the needs of their campuses. The inevitable and perhaps intuitive conclusion is that there is no magic wand, no secret budget allocation model that checks all the boxes.

As a library serving a large, public, flagship university with many different disciplines and subject areas that have different needs for scholarship, different acquisition patterns and cycles, and different characteristics of chaos, we cannot continue to use a budget allocation model that treats these different groups as largely homogenous. In order to meet these different needs we will have to break away from the one-size-fits-all allocation model.

One of the comments from the survey was, “[w]e do not allocate the budget.” They explained, “[a]ny librarian liaison can request resources,” and that allocation is done “as needed. This is why we don’t allocate the budget. Where ever [sic] the need is we

support it. Not every program needs a new database or journal every year.”

This would be a sharp departure from our current model, but it might be appropriate for some subset of disciplines, perhaps where there is a high level of interdisciplinary collaboration going on among the departments.

Our next steps in our multiyear budget review process is to dig a little more into the survey results and begin to share this with our colleagues at the UW Libraries and continue the conversations on our budget structure and allocation model. We have the opportunity to build on our recently completed strategic planning process and the rigorous and inclusive conversations that led to a Strategic Plan that gives us some direction for how to think about our collections and help us as we start to look at what our budget allows us to do. We are also building on an effort to create new models for transparent and participatory decision making to create a sense of shared ownership of the process.

There is a line in Tolstoy’s *Anna Karenina*, “all happy families are alike; each unhappy family is unhappy in its own way.” The idea is that a number of things need to come together to make a family happy and all happy families have them, but removing any



combination of those things makes for an unhappy family in their own unique way. Similarly with our budget model, there are many factors that would need to be satisfied to make everyone happy, but given our many different needs, almost any budget model we develop is never going to make everyone, or anyone, happy. So perhaps the best we can do is define success when everyone is equally unhappy.

## Appendix A: A Survey of Collections Budget Allocation Practices

### Introduction

The University of Washington is conducting a survey to analyze collection budget allocation practices among libraries. Your input will provide important information about current practices as well as future contemplated changes. Your willingness to answer this brief survey, which should take only 10–15 minutes of your time, is greatly appreciated. Interested participants will receive a summary of survey results. Please respond no later than [date, ETA July 30, 2018].

A preliminary version of this survey was administered with the ALCTS Chief Collection Development Officers at Large Research Libraries in January 2018. Thank you for participating—and thanks to Penn State University Libraries, whose 2013 survey was adapted in the preparation of these questions (<http://dx.doi.org/10.5703/1288284315251>).

### Questions

#### Institutional Demographics

1. At what type of institution do you work?
  1. Public Academic Research Library
  2. Private Academic Research Library
  3. Public Library
  4. National Library
2. What is your Total Student FTE?
  1. < 10k
  2. 10k–19k
  3. 20k–29k
  4. 30k–39k
  5. > 40k
  6. Not applicable
3. Number of Bachelor's Degree Fields?
  1. < 24
  2. 25–49
  3. 50–99
  4. 100–199
  5. > 200
  6. Not applicable
4. Number of Doctor's Degree Fields?
  1. < 24
  2. 25–49
  3. 50–99
  4. 100–199
  5. > 200
  6. Not applicable

#### Current Collections Budget Allocation Practices

5. How do you allocate your budget?
  1. Based on historical allocation patterns
  2. Formula
  3. Base formula with additional money available by request
  4. Other, please specify
6. What is the level of granularity or specificity of your budget?
  1. Individual subject funds
  2. Larger aggregated funds (such as college/school based)
  3. Mixture, please specify (e.g., different models for serials and monographs)
  4. Other, please specify
7. How do you allocate funds for serials/continuing resources?
  1. Off the top, as part of a single comprehensive serials line
  2. Off the top, in separate lines according to serial type, e.g., continuations, databases, e-journal packages, etc.
  3. As part of the subject/college/school budget allocations

4. Other, please specify
8. What percent of your library materials budget is typically allocated to serials/ongoing costs?
  1. 40–50%
  2. 50–60%
  3. 60–70%
  4. 70–80%
  5. 80–90%
  6. 90–100%
  7. Other, please specify
9. How do you create funds for new serials? (Check all that apply)
  1. Allocation off the top
  2. From cancellations of existing subscriptions
  3. From repurposing of monograph funds within a subject/college/school allocation
  4. Other, please specify
10. How do you allocate funds for new/emerging needs (e.g., new programs, data, streaming media, etc.)?
  1. Off the top as a separate budget line
  2. Included in subject/college/school budgets
  3. Other, please specify
11. Does your library play a role in planning for new programs? (yes/no or N/A)
12. If yes, please specify. (NOT REQUIRED)
- Context and Motivations for Making or Considering Changes to Budget Allocations**
13. Have you made any changes to the way you allocate your collections budget in the last 5 years? (yes/no)
14. If yes, please explain your motivations for making or considering changes to your budget allocation model. (check all that apply) (NOT REQUIRED)
- a. Budget cut
- b. Staff reorganization
- c. Changes with University Administration
- d. Responsibility Centered Management Implementation (e.g., individual academic units, the control of revenue and expenditures, including support for library)
- e. Other, please specify
15. Are you considering any significant changes now or in the near future to the way you allocate your collections budget? (yes/no)
16. If yes, please explain your motivations for making or considering changes to your budget allocation model. (check all that apply) (NOT REQUIRED)
  - a. Budget cut
  - b. Staff reorganization
  - c. Changes with University Administration
  - d. Responsibility Centered Management Implementation (e.g., individual academic units, the control of revenue and expenditures, including support for library)
  - e. Other, please specify
17. Do you ever share the costs of collection purchases or subscriptions with either of the following (check all that apply):
  - a. Budgets under the control of other library units on your own campus, e.g., a medical or law school library
  - b. Budgets under the control of libraries that are part of other campuses in your system
  - c. Budgets under the control of a nonlibrary campus unit
  - d. Not applicable
18. Is there anything else you would like to add to help frame your responses?
19. Would you be interested in receiving a summary of survey results? Yes/No



20. If yes, please provide your contact information:

Name

Institution

Position/Title

E-mail

Phone

## Notes

1. Libraries Fact Sheet 2018 at <http://www.lib.washington.edu/assessment/statistics/facts> and Selected Library Statistics by Campus at <http://www.lib.washington.edu/assessment/statistics/default> (downloaded November 20, 2018).
2. Proceedings available online at <http://dx.doi.org/10.5703/1288284315251> (downloaded November 20, 2018).